

**CIHM
Microfiche
Series
(Monographs)**

**ICMH
Collection de
microfiches
(monographies)**



Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions / Institut canadien de microreproductions historiques

© 1998

OVERTURE

RE

ELDER - MODERATOR

Points in the Government of the Presbyterian Church in Canada

(UNOFFICIAL)

BY

REV. ROBERT CAMPBELL, D.D.



OVERTURE *RE* ELDER-MODERATOR.

POINTS IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN
CANADA (UNOFFICIAL).

The Reverend

DEAR SIR,—

Please receive, with my compliments, two copies of the following tract which I have gone to the expense and trouble to prepare, one for yourself, and the other for the representative Elder of your congregation. It flashed on my mind, at the last General Assembly, that the brethren generally had not at their disposal the means of fully informing themselves on the historical bearings of the question, and so I withdrew my amendment, and resolved to do what I am now doing.

Yours sincerely,

ROBERT CAMPBELL.

68 St. Famille Street, Montreal,
November 12th, 1918.

To avoid confusion and misunderstanding, it is necessary at the threshold of the discussion, to call attention to the fact that the Westminster divines recognize, in their "Form of Church Government," which is part of our charter, only one class of Presbyters (Elders), and these are ordained Ministers; while they as stoutly maintain that "Christ hath furnished some in His Church, beside the Ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the Ministers in the government of the Church." These are spoken of not as Elders but "Church Governors" or "ruling officers," "which officers," they Remark, "reformed Churches commonly call Elders," although they do not endorse the propriety of the title. The scriptural equivalent of these officers is "*helps, governments,*" mentioned by the Apostle Paul. In the discussion which follows, while for the sake of convenience, the term "Ruling Elder" is employed, it is in this qualified sense.

1. *Overtures.*

It will be admitted that there must be a limit to proposals that may be made in Overtures to the General Assembly. For instance, it would assuredly be incompetent to receive a plea for the introduction of the Mass into the service of the Church, as that would be a manifest violation of the Article of the Constitution guaranteeing "purity of worship." And so, if a proposal were made to exchange our Presbyterian system of government for prelacy or independency, it is clearly precluded, as well as the matter of worship, by Article (3) of our Charter, which reads: "The government and worship of this Church shall be in accordance with the recognized principles of Presbyterian Churches, as laid down generally in the 'Form of Presbyterian Church Government,' and in the 'Directory for the Public Worship of God.'" And if the Assembly should receive and adopt such Overtures, in defiance of this Article of the Constitution, it would cease to be the historic Presbyterian Church in Canada, dating from 15th June, 1875.

It may be that the adoption of the Mass or of Prelacy would be a more conspicuous departure from the present principles and practice of Presbyterian Churches than the proposal of the Overture now before the Church, yet the latter is scarcely less important, when its full bearings are considered, as I hope to show. The fact is, that the Committee on Bills and Overture, if it had been sufficiently vigilant, would have been justified in refusing to transmit the Overture to the Assembly, seeing that part of its duty is to judge whether documents coming before it "are part of the legitimate business of the Assembly."

For the same reason, an Overture from a Presbytery a few years ago, craving the Assembly to sanction a time limit to the tenure of the office of "Ruling Elder," was incompetent, although the "Committee on Bills and Overtures" sent it up to the Assembly. The Supreme Court, indeed, made short work of it, but it never should have been received, because it proposed to change the status of "Ruling Elders," as guaranteed to them by Article (3) of the Constitution. If we are prohibited by the Charter from altering the status of Elder by shearing the office of its present dignity and importance; by a parity of reasoning, we are precluded from adding to the prerogatives of the office, in the manner proposed in the Overture, the doing of which would trench on the prerogative of Ministers, and derange the relation hitherto subsisting be-

tween the ministry and the eldership, as will be seen in the further discussion of the subject.

One wonders that the respected brethren in a distant mission field, where a fully equipped Presbyterian Church can scarcely yet be developed, and where, therefore, there can be little experience of the problems growing out of congregational and presbyterial life, should have taken it upon themselves to challenge the practice of the Church, in the matter regarding which they sent up the Overture now before the Presbyteries. Surely we may all shrink from taking a position on this question which implies that almost the entire Presbyterian world, some portions of it having a history of centuries, has wrongly interpreted the teaching of scripture on the point in question.

Even if the allegations of the Overture were admitted, they would not establish that it has been "the practice" of Presbyterian Churches to elect ruling elders moderators, and it is the practice to which our Constitution restricts us, not deviations from that practice. Granted that George Buchanan was elected Moderator of the Church of Scotland in 1567, can that fact, once in 358 years, be cited as showing what the practice of the Church of Scotland is? But, as a matter of fact, the Constitution of the Church of Scotland, approved by the General Assembly and Parliament of Scotland, as set forth in the Second Book of Discipline, was not fixed until 1638, and it stipulated that the Moderator of the Church Courts should be a Minister. It gave place in 1647 to the "Form of Presbyterian Church Government," which is part of our Constitution; and this was confirmed by William and Mary, in 1690, and by Queen Anne in 1710, when the maintenance of Presbyterianism in Scotland was made one of the terms of the union of the two kingdoms. It is to be presumed that in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in India, and in that of the Presbyterian Church South, referred to in the Overture, there is nothing to hinder the election of an elder to the Moderator's Chair, as there is in our Constitution. Besides, it was the practice in Presbyterian Churches, at the time our Constitution was adopted, that we are governed by, not by any recent deviation from that practice.

2. Rules and Forms of Procedure.

The four Churches which united in 1875 to form "the Presbyterian Church in Canada" all had rules and forms of procedure, following generally the precedents and practice of

the several sections of Presbyterianism in Scotland from which they received their origin. But in Scotland, those separating from the established Church continued to constitute their Church Courts as in the parent Church. Consequently, it was found that there was almost entire uniformity in procedure; but it was resolved that it was only what was common to all four that should be in the meantime used. At the same time, a subcommittee on Ecclesiastical Procedure was appointed, as follows: Dr. G. Bell, *Convener*, Principal Snodgrass, Principal Cavan, Dr. Waters, Dr. Geo. Paterson, Prof. McKerras, Prof. Gregg, Messrs. T. Sedgwick, J. Middlemiss, J. Laing, Wm. Reid, R. Campbell, Wm. Fraser, J. G. Robb and G. M. Grant, *Ministers*, and T. W. Taylor and Judge Stevens, *Elders*. The committee made it its duty to secure copies of the Forms and Rules of Procedure of the principal Presbyterian churches of the world, in order to frame a manual, as complete as possible, for the guidance of the Church.

This committee, from which my name was dropped in 1877, with slight changes afterwards, embraced the three Clerks of Assembly, Clerks of Synods and Presbyteries and professors, whose business it was to lecture on Church Government; and drafted the "Book of Forms," which was substantially the same as our present "Rules and Forms of Procedure." It engaged the attention more or less of eight General Assemblies, and was three times sent down to Presbyteries for their consideration, and, meeting with their approval, was finally adopted by the Assembly in 1890.

From the first, in every draft of the handbook, the regulations, as to the Moderator being a Minister, was inserted, and no objection was ever taken to it. The men who framed the regulations had all been parties to the acceptance by the United Church of the "Form of Church Government," of the Westminster Assembly, as setting forth the teaching of scripture on the subject; they were parties also to the adoption of Section (3) of the "Basis of Union," and in the regulations in question, there was agreement with the principles and practice of the Church of Scotland, with those of the United and Free Churches of Scotland, with those of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, which may be called our mother churches; and also with those of the greatest Presbyterian Church in the world, that of the United States of America, which is notably loyal to the Westminster standards.

3. *The Ordained Minister.*—The Scottish reformers assigned

a high place in their ecclesiastical system to the ordained ministry, and the Westminster Assembly has embodied in the "Form of Presbyterian Church Government" these principles. Young men, either receiving an inward call from the Spirit of God, or responding to appeals made to them on this behalf, offer themselves for the work of the ministry. This becoming known to the authorities of the Church the Presbytery judges of their intellectual and other qualifications, and being satisfied attest them to one of the colleges provided by the Church for training candidates for the ministry, where they devote themselves for a prescribed number of years to those studies deemed necessary to fit a man to preach the Gospel. This course being completed to the satisfaction of their instructors the students are taken on trials for license by a Presbytery, and these being sustained, they are sent forth to make trial of their gifts as probationers. Approving themselves to a congregation, they receive a call therefrom, and thereupon are ordained by the Presbytery within the bounds of which said congregation is situated. The call is, in the Presbyterian system an essential going before ordination. All the previous steps go for nothing, unless the candidate commends himself to the people as possessing gifts, acquirements and graces fitted to edify the hearers. The framers of our Church government took for their guide the practice of the Apostles, who would not ordain Matthias, or the seven deacons, without the previous consent had of the entire body of the disciples. This qualification for ordination is too much overlooked in the recent practice of our Church; but it ought to be strongly emphasized as the normal procedure in the settlement of young preachers. The ordination which follows signifies that the young man in the judgment of the Church has been "called of God," through all his preparatory course, and the final approval of a congregation and induction by the Presbytery, and is therefore set apart to the spiritual office of minister, to which, as his life work he is expected to devote all his gifts, thoughts, strength and time. His status in the Church corresponds not altogether to that of the Apostles, who were specially endowed with extraordinary powers, but rather to that of their successors, Timothy and Titus. The ordinary work of the Apostles, preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments, ordained ministers share in. They, too, "are ambassadors for Christ, beseeching men to be reconciled unto God."

"The Minister is Moderator of the Session"—so runs the

rule. He is so in virtue of his office. When the Apostle enumerates the gifts which Christ had bestowed upon His Church at that time—"apostles and prophets," he includes "evangelists, pastors and teachers," as providing for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry and for the edifying of the body of Christ," the Westminster divines find that these three offices may be filled in one and the same person, the ordained Minister. In like manner, they interpret the two scripture terms, *presbuteros* and *episcopos*, as equivalent to the pastor or teacher or minister. He presides over the Session because its members are to receive the word at his mouth and the sacraments at his hands, as all the rest of the congregation have to do, and as they all subscribed the call to him, elders and members, promising him "all due respect, encouragement and obedience in the Lord." It is in the Session the relative status of Ministers and ruling elders is settled. (The manual of the great Presbyterian Church of the United States of America designates the Minister *bishop*, to indicate his rank in the Session.) The Minister is the head and centre of the congregation, and as such it is his prerogative to preside at all congregational meetings, if he has a mind to. The Westminster "Form of Church Government" declares: "He hath also a ruling power over the flock as pastor."

4. The "Church Ruler" or "Elder."—It is a unique position which is occupied by the "Ruling Elder" in the Presbyterian Church. It is one of the distinctive features of the system. The office of deacon in Congregational and Baptist Churches falls far short of that of our Elder in dignity and influence; and so does the Warden in the Church of England, and the lay delegates in the Methodist Conference. Chosen to the office by his fellows of the members of the congregation, he comes into the Session with the backing of the people, and that not merely for a year, but for a lifetime. The permanence of the office adds immensely to its influence. When matters were in their early stage of development, the office was held only for a year, in the Scottish Church, and that for a curious reason: "Lest of long continuance of such officers men presume upon the liberty of the kirk." However, in the "Second Book of Discipline," in which the complete constitution of the Church of Scotland was set forth, this is found: "The eldership is a spiritual function, as is the ministry; elders once lawfully called to the office, and having gifts of God meet to exercise the same, may not leave it again." "Their office is, as well severally as conjointly, to watch diligently

upon the flock committed to their charge, both publicly and privately, that no corruption of religion or manners enter therein." They are set apart to their office by the Session already in existence, the Minister invoking the Spirit of God upon them in an ordaining prayer.

The Westminster Assembly, without adopting the term "Elder," strongly asserted, as we have seen, the position that there must be representatives of the congregation associated with the Minister in the government of the congregation. "As there were in the Jewish Church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the Church, so Christ, who hath instituted government and governors ecclesiastical in the Church, hath furnished some in His Church, beside the Minister of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereupon, who are to join with the Minister in the government of the Church, which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders." They do not accept the title of the ruler, but they assert the thing, "Church rulers." They thought that confusion resulted in the Church of Scotland from the use of the word "Elder," because they reserved the Greek word *presbuteros* as equivalent to "bishop" or "minister."

By whatever title known, they, in the Church Courts, are the chosen representatives of the membership of the congregation through whom the self-government of the Church is secured. We have seen that at the very beginning of the Christian organization, the advice or consent of the disciples, at large, was obtained before the eleven Apostles would choose a substitute for Judas Iscariot, or would ordain deacons. In accordance with that ideal, we find that at the Council of Jerusalem and on other occasions, account is taken of the co-operation of "the whole church," meaning thereby the whole body of the faithful through their representatives. The Westminster divines make a happy use of this scripture phrase to set forth their conception of the unity of Christians. Our Presbyterian system, they contend, is a government of the whole church by the whole church; in which "the whole is responsible for each, and each is answerable to the whole." It is a spiritual democracy, if you will, in contradistinction to the papal system, which is imperialistic. But the ordination of these "elders" or "church rulers" is of a different kind from that of the Ministers. The latter are solemnly set apart, by the

laying on of the hands of the brethren of the Presbytery, to the office of the pastorate, as their life's business, to which they are to consecrate all their time and strength; whereas the ruling elders are ordained by prayer alone, by authority of the Session, and do not enter into obligations as to the amount of time they are to take from their secular calling to devote to their spiritual functions in the Church, but only undertake to serve the congregation, as occasion demands, from their leisure and with what energy they are possessed of, after the discharge of their ordinary duties of life. The Ministers and Elders, therefore, stand upon two distinct platforms in the matter of ordination. At the same time, the fact that Elders give up even a portion of their time and strength gratuitously to church work, very properly increases their influence and deepens the gratitude and respect of the members of the Church.

5. *In the Higher Courts.*—It is in the Session and congregation that the relative status of the Minister and Elder is determined, as it is the sphere in which the latter is specially elected and ordained to fill; and while the Minister is *ex officio* a member of the Presbytery, an Elder does not of necessity ever obtain a seat in any of the higher courts. Many elders never appear in them, because not chosen representative elder. When he appears in the Presbytery as representative Elder, he is no more than an Elder, and acquires no elevation of status, and when he meets his Minister on this new platform, his relation to him is nowise altered; and they are placed on the roll of Presbytery in two distinct classes. Then, no Elder is appointed representative for longer than a year at a time. These limitations, even if the way were open to him otherwise to be elected Moderator of Presbytery, would amount to a practical disqualification for the office. But no stress is laid on this point. Stress is, however, laid on the next point I make. The remit does not propose to change the rule which prescribes that the Minister is *ex officio* the Moderator of the Session. Not only is the pastor, in virtue of his office, Moderator of the Session, but in case of a vacancy, or when the Minister is absent, the Elders cannot constitute themselves into a legal session, but some neighboring Minister is sought to come and preside over it. So serious are some of the matters coming before sessions that only "pastors and teachers" are held to be competent to deal with them efficiently, and give effect to the findings of the Court. The supporters of the Remit apparently acquiesce in the need to have a Minister preside over a session; but they overlook the fact

that there is nothing that comes before the session that may not, on reference or appeal, also come before the Presbytery; aye, all the proceedings of Sessions must come once a year before Presbyteries in review; besides a great variety of other matters which an Elder is not qualified to determine. If an Elder is not competent to preside over a Session, in dealing with matters comparatively simple and restricted, how is it possible that he can be qualified to preside over the consideration of matters belonging to all the Sessions of the Presbytery, or concerns of larger consequence or more serious import—such as the licensing of students, the calling and ordaining of Ministers, or the disciplining of those who err? Not only is it beyond the power of an Elder to preside at the ordination of a Minister, but the rules provide that while Elders can be present and give advice as to the propriety of proceeding to the ordination, following the Apostolic practice, they do not share in the act of ordination by the laying on of hands. In short, the ruling elder is not officially qualified to perform many functions that fall to be discharged by the Moderator of a Presbytery. This being so, the rule as it stands should be preserved: "The Moderator is a Minister."

Some have criticized these terms, as if they had not the force of a command. But it is equivalent to saying the Moderator is of necessity a Minister—it is not dependent upon the wish or vote of the court whether or not he is a Minister; and what is true of the Presbytery is true of the Synod and General Assembly, the same words being used. It is the custom of Synods to open with a sermon and it is prescribed that "a sermon is preached by the Moderator of the last Assembly," implying that he is a Minister, for it is not the function of Ruling Elders to preach.

6. *History of the Agitation.*—The mover in the Assembly of the adoption and the remitting of the Overture to Presbyteries, assuming that the matter was one that could be dealt with in that way by the Assembly, went to work in the right way. So long as the present rule stands in the regulations by which the Presbyteries and the Assemblies have voted approval so often as we have seen, he declared that he could not be a party to a violation of the rule. Had members of Presbyteries throughout the Church been all actuated by a like regard for law and order, we should not have to-day this serious problem on our hands. The question was thrust upon the Church not by a respectful overture, but by certain Pres-

byteries taking it upon themselves to disregard the law, which irregular proceeding was reported to the superior courts, some of which censured the irregularity, while others referred the matter to the Supreme Court for adjudication. One Assembly appointed a committee to report on the subject to the next Assembly; but the committee failed to comply with the instruction of the Assembly, when there was a reconstructed committee appointed. It too failed to bring in a report to the next Assembly, an individual member of the committee informing the Assembly that the committee could not agree upon a report. Whereupon the Assembly discharged the committee and resolved unanimously "that the matter take end."

So it remained until 1913, when an Overture was presented to the Assembly, again asking to have it declared that a Ruling Elder may be eligible to be elected Moderator in the Courts of the Church. The Assembly turned the Overture over to the Committee on Subscription to the Standards, appointed the previous year. This committee, although it had on hand already an important question, grappled with the matter regarding which there had been much shilly-shallying and brought in a finding which I insert, and in it we have on record the mature views on the question of at least that weighty committee. Names of the committee: Dr. McQueen, *Convener*, Dr. D. D. McLeod, *Vice-Convener*, Dr. T. Sedgwick, Mr. T. F. Fullerton, Mr. Anderson Rogers, Dr. R. Campbell, Dr. D. M. Ramsay, Mr. J. Macdougall, Dr. M. Macgillivray, Dr. W. G. Wallace, Mr. J. Wallace, Dr. D. R. Drummond, Dr. James Ross, Mr. Robertson Martin, Dr. F. B. Duval, Mr. R. S. Laidlaw, Dr. Peter Strang, Mr. C. G. Young, Mr. M. Wilson, Mr. J. A. Clark, Mr. J. S. Henderson, Mr. W. L. Clay, *Ministers*, Judge Forbes, Mr. Walter Paul, Mr. Richard Lees, Mr. John Lowden, Mr. R. McQueen, Mr. W. W. Miller, Hon. W. R. Motherwell, Mr. D. S. MacKenzie, Mr. James Beveridge, *Elders*.

This carefully selected committee held two meetings, which were largely attended; and when a report was agreed upon, a copy of it was sent to all the absent members, who acquiesced in it, so that it went up to the Assembly *non con*. Its finding is as follows:

"1. Our Rule 52 reads: 'The Minister is Moderator of the Session.' He is so in virtue of his ministerial character being placed by the Church at large, through the action of the Presbytery, in charge of the congregation, the Elders included, and authorized to administer the word and sacraments. The

Elders are appointed by Sessions and are associated with Ministers in Sessions for ruling only.

"2. In Sections 77, 99 and 114 of our rules, it is stated that 'the Moderator is a Minister' in Presbyteries, Synods and General Assemblies; and it is so ordered because Ministers and Elders carry with them from the Sessions to the higher courts the same relative status that they held in the Sessions. Some of the functions which Moderators of the higher courts have to discharge, Ministers alone are authorized to perform.

"3. Seeing further that our rule in this matter is in accord with the general practice in Presbyterian Churches, and that it was one of the terms of agreement entered into by the uniting churches in 1875, that 'the government of this Church shall be in accordance with the recognized principles and practice of Presbyterian Churches, as laid down generally in 'The Form of Presbyterian Church Government,' our Church courts are not free to depart from the constitutional rule on the point laid down in our 'Book of Rules and Forms of Procedure.' "

7. *General Remarks.*

It has been noted already that confusion and perplexity have arisen among scripture readers by the mistaking of the "Ruling Elder" for the *Presbuteros* of the New Testament, which the Westminster divines reserve for ordained Ministers. The Apostle Peter designated himself a *fellow elder*, a semi-*Presbuteros*, with the elders to whom he addressed his epistle. That fact warrants the maintaining of the principle asserted by the Westminster Assembly, that the higher rank includes the lower ones. For instance, the Ruling Elder presupposes church membership, and we know that the Apostles performed the duties of deacons before they established the Order of Deacons. It was not because they were incompetent to discharge those duties that they sought relief from them, but because they desired to be free to devote their time to prayer and the ministry of the word. And so, while Peter calls himself a fellow elder, in addressing Elders (or Presbyters), he was more than a Presbyter, he was an Apostle, and it was in virtue of his apostolate that he felt authorized to address them as he did.

And here it may be as well to explain the importance which the Westminster Assembly, and, indeed, all champions of Presbyterian orders, attach to the proper meaning of the New Testament word *Presbyter*. They contend against prelatists that there is not a threefold ministry: Bishops, Presby-

ters and Deacons; and they found their contentions upon the fact that the three orders are never mentioned together, but *Episcopos* and *Presbyteros* are convertible terms. Bishops are in one place coupled with Deacons, and in another place Presbyters and Deacons. To extend the significance of *Presbyteros* also to a lower class, the elders of Presbyterianism, would weaken their argument.

Perhaps it is in the thought of some people that the adoption of the proposal of the Overture is demanded by the democratic spirit of the age. But the democracy of the Christian Church, as its ideal was set forth in the Apostle's time, differed very widely from the vaunted democracy of the 20th century. Those into whose hands the Apostles committed a share in the government of the Church were persons guided by the spirit of God in answer to prayer. Not into the hands of people irrespective of divine guidance were the destinies of the early Church in part confided. The Westminster Assembly puts this matter in its true light when they wrote the preface to "The Form of Presbyterian Church Government." "Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government is, whose name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, received gifts for His Church, and gave officers necessary for the edification of His Church, and perfecting of His saints." It was what He, the King and Head of the Church, laid down in His word, that is to govern in His Church, not what worldly notions men gather from human institutions that are not specially Christian. As in all the rest of their articles they were guided by the principle, only what is plainly taught in the Scriptures, or can be deduced from them by legitimate inference, was to be embodied in their propositions. The Presbyterian Church will be well advised never to be moved from that high vantage ground. It will be perilous to depart from that principle. One of Hooker's arguments, in his "Ecclesiastical Polity," is that prelacy is a more efficient form of government than Presbyterianism; but without conceding the point, our reply is, what of that if it be anti-Scriptural? Hooker's postulate is made to justify all the departures from the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus, in the elaborate policy of the Church of Rome. Let us adhere tenaciously to the Westminster Assembly's position, and go for nothing but what is taught in Scripture.

It was regrettable that a somewhat injured tone was shown by some of the Elders, who took part in the discussion of this

subject in the last General Assembly, implying that they felt themselves lying under a grievance. This was unwarranted. They have no grievance. If, in the past, in the Churches from which we have derived our precedents and history, Elders were chosen Moderators, and if we were refusing them what has been recognized elsewhere and in other ages, then there would be ground of complaint. But the claim is a new one. For hundreds of years such a claim has not been put forth by Elders from the oldest Presbyterian Churches, nor in our own Church, until recent years. But should this Overture be adopted, a real grievance would be created. The Ministers, one of whose prerogatives it is to be elected Moderators of Presbyteries, Synods and General Assemblies, would have a grievance, because their right would be invaded by the election of an Elder to that office.

The semi-clerical claim put forth by some Elders taking part in the discussion at last Assembly, founded on what was assumed to be the common eldership existing between ministers and ruling elders, in reality is an abandoning of the office of Elder, as it has been in the Church since the reformation, and which has made it a power for good, owing to its being the representative of the members of the Church. Our elders do not need to be ashamed of that position by wanting to have its authority and dignity increased as is proposed.

Shall I be pardoned if I beg humbly to suggest that the conduct of those who took it upon themselves to disregard the rule and elected Elders as moderators of Presbyteries, savoured somewhat of toadyism? If I am not mistaken, they were civil judges who were thus illegally elevated, the other members of Presbytery thereby signifying that they counted it a special honour that these dignified civil officials condescended to occupy a seat in the Presbytery. How different that from the atmosphere of the churches across the seas, where the occupants of castles take their seat in sessions alongside the occupants of cottages and think themselves honoured by being selected by the members of the Church to so high an office as that of Elder. The most distinguished civilians in the land have taken part in the business of the Church Courts, and never dreamt of being called to the Moderator's chair. To them it was honour enough and dignity enough to be chosen to represent in the courts the great body of the faithful in the Church. It was of Ministers seeking higher office, however, not of Elders, that Stewart of Pardovan makes the observa-

tion: "If any man affects this office he should be opposed in his ambitious purposes."

If I deprecate the proposal of the Overture, it is not because I do not put a high estimate upon the office of the Ruling Elder as distinct from that of pastor and teacher. No one has had better opportunities than I of judging of the value of the services they render to the Church. The elect of the membership, they lend both dignity and strength to the Church's deliberations and counsels, and this they do with their relative status as it is at present. Nor are the "Ruling Elders" to be held responsible for starting the agitation on the question at issue. It is ministerial brethren, meaning well undoubtedly, who have raised the question; but I venture to think that in doing so they have not adequately weighed it, nor have they considered the danger of marring the peace of the Church and disturbing the happy relations which for hundreds of years have subsisted between ministers and elders, by insisting that the latter are having their ecclesiastical rights withheld from them.

I have stated that the agitation of this question did not begin with the Elders. I might also state with the utmost confidence that no Elder would for a moment desire to occupy a position in the Church Courts, if his right to do so was open to serious doubt.

I have confined myself to the ecclesiastical aspect of the question, leaving to others to deal with other points of view.

Authorities consulted: Assembly Minutes, Minutes of Westminster Assembly, Records of the House of Lords and the House of Commons of Great Britain during the period of the Westminster Assembly, Books of Discipline of the Church of Scotland, Stewart of Pardovan's Collections and Observations, Hill's Practice in Church of Scotland, Forbes' Digest of Rules and Procedure, Free Church of Scotland, Works of Lightfoot, George Gillespie, Robert Baillie, and Samuel Rutherford.